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Housekeepers' Chat

U. S. Department of Agriculture

Tuesday, September 30, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Furnishing a Boy's Room." Approved by Bureau of Home Economics,  
U.S.D.A.

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Billy was late, getting home from school last night. I was considering tactful ways and means of teaching him to be more prompt, when I heard his cheerful voice in the back yard.

"Gangway! shouted Billy. "Gangway! Please open the door, Aunt Sammy."

I rushed to the kitchen door. There was Billy, puffing and panting, behind a huge metal tank.

"What in the world?" I asked. "What in the world! And where did it come from?"

"Please hold the screen door open," said Billy. "I'll have to come in sideways, I guess. Gee, it's heavy. Can I leave it here, for a little while? I found it in the alley, behind Mr. Jenkins' grocery store."

"What were you doing in the alley?"

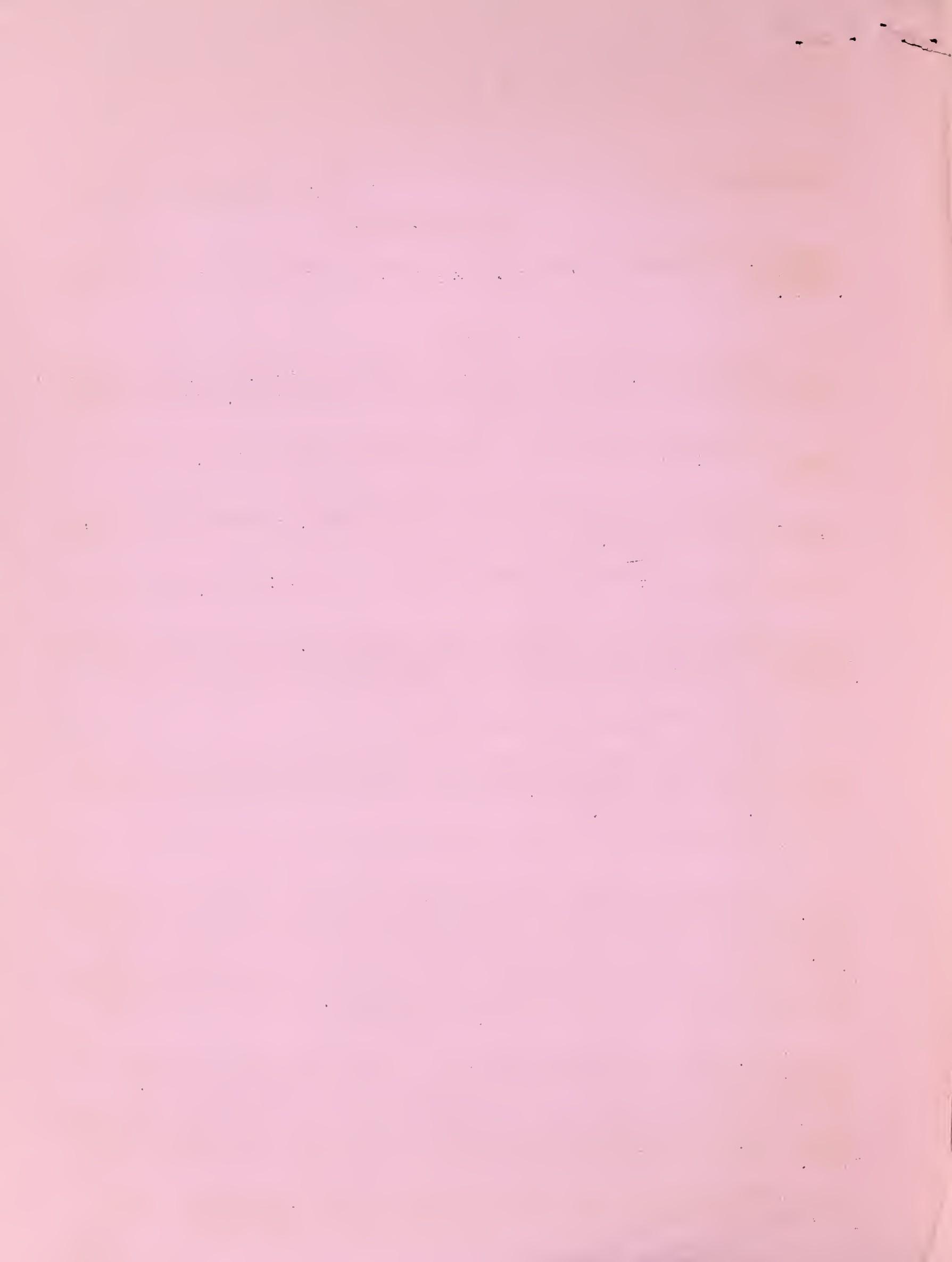
"Oh, just looking for things. Mr. Jenkins said he'd be glad to get rid of this, if you didn't mind. I told him you never minded anything I bring home, except snakes."

"But what are you going to keep in this--- this vegetable bin?"

"It's not a vegetable bin. It used to be. I'm going to keep fish in it. You know, Aunt Sammy," continued Billy, growing more enthusiastic, "you know that old desk in the attic? I'm going to take the top off the desk, and put it in my room. This tank will just fit on the desk. Then I'll fill the tank with water and put my fish in it. I want big goldfish, and I can't have big fish in little old glass bowls. Please, Aunt Sammy, you don't care if I do it! Do you, Aunt Sammy?"

Well, what would you have done, in a case like that? I melted, before the pleading in Billy's blue eyes. As soon as dinner was over, he dashed up to the attic. Uncle Ebenezer followed, dismantled an old desk which has four good legs, and superintended the job of moving the desk to his room. On the desk, he placed the vegetable bin, and filled it with water. His prize goldfish are now swimming in luxury.

"They probably think it's the Atlantic ocean," said Billy. "Gosh! I bet they were glad to get out of that tiny little glass bowl."



"Billy," said Uncle Ebenezer, "you are fast becoming a disturbing factor in our otherwise calm and tranquil home. Won't you please keep out of alleys, for the rest of the year? I know that according to the modern child psychologists, it is not good to curb a child's natural inclinations. At the same time, it is not desirable for one of my advancing years to move heavy desks from attics."

"Aw, Uncle Ebenezer," said Billy, "you ought to be glad you aren't a goldfish, and always have to live in a little old glass bowl, till somebody finds you a nice big tank!"

"Yes," agreed Uncle Ebenezer, "from the standpoint of a goldfish, I am indeed a fortunate individual. And if you turn out to be a great naturalist, I suppose I will 'point with pride' to the fact that I did not discourage your childhood hobbies. Where is the evening paper?"

After Billy had gone upstairs to rejoice over his new-found treasure, and Uncle Ebenezer had settled down to reading, I looked over the letters which came in yesterday's mail. You see how I spend my spare time. Well, right on top of the letters, the first one I opened, was this:

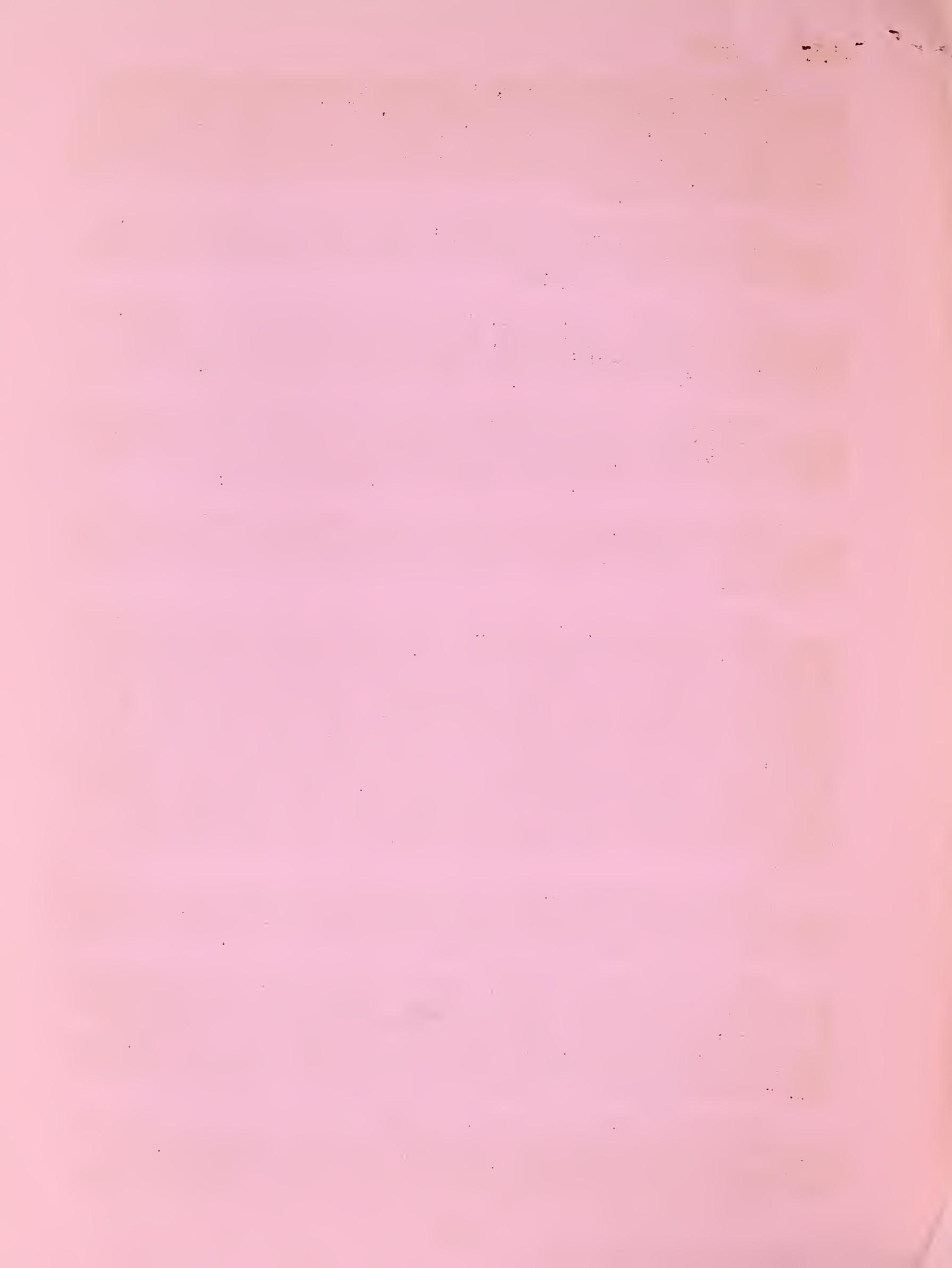
"Dear Aunt Sammy: We are moving into a new house this fall, and I would like to hear any ideas you may have about furnishing a room for a 10-year-old boy. I want my son to have a room he will enjoy living in. Can you help me?"

That is the letter. I wished, for a minute, that the writer could have spent the previous four hours with us, and could have seen Billy's pleasure in his new fish tank. But no, on second thought, I decided that perhaps it was just as well she was not there. Perhaps she would have turned up her nose, at our home-made aquarium. She might have made fun of anyone who would allow such goings-on in her house. And just as sure as anything, if she had been there, that vegetable-bin goldfish tank would have sprung a leak, and leaked water and goldfish all over the bedroom floor, and like as not spatter water all over the lady's new fall suit. How do I know? Because that's the way things happen when I try to explain, by concrete example, how I am bringing up Billy, to be a happy and useful citizen.

So please understand I'm not recommending that small boys go out into alleys and bring home vegetable bins for fish tanks. No, indeed! I'm just telling you a true story, about a small boy I'm very fond of.

But to return to the letter. It is a good letter, and it deserves a good answer. So I'll do my best. I wish, however, that I had the 10-year old boy here, to question. I'd ask him what he wants in his room. I'd try to discover his hobbies, what he's most interested in. As a rule, small boys are sadly neglected when it comes to their rooms. Like the sorrowful camel, "anything does" for the small boy, in the way of a bedroom.

Usually the boy's room, if he's lucky enough to have one of his own, is cluttered up with broken-down furniture, left-over knick-knacks, and pictures that no one else wants. Wouldn't it be fine if every child could have a room of his own, or at least a corner of a room, to which he could



retire from the rest of the family, and work and play in peace?

Don't let anybody make fun of the queer things your boy brings home in his pockets, but give him a cabinet to keep his collection in. If he likes books, be sure there are wide shelves in his room, for books and magazines. Sometimes a small writing table, with a drawer, is the most cherished piece of furniture in a child's room. If you intend to spend a little money on furniture you might buy the boy a junior writing desk. These desks are built so that they may be raised, as the child has need for a higher piece of furniture. An adjustable chair, or a bench, comes with the desk.

Let your boy's furniture be durable, of simple, good design. Whatever color there is in the room — in the curtains, bedspread, and so forth — should be strong in value. Green, blue, brown, or orange should please him. If he thinks that ruffly, dainty curtains belong to girls, let him have a vigorous pattern in cretonne, or a strong color in denim, sateen, crash or osnaburg. Theatrical gauze makes very suitable glass curtains that are masculine enough to appeal to any boy. Hang the curtains from a painted pole or a simple wrought iron rod, without a valance.

But how I do "go on," when it comes to furnishing children's rooms! You can see what one of my hobbies is! I have helped furnish a number of rooms for children, and I am likely to forget there are other subjects just as important.

But while we're on the subject of children, let me read you some good suggestions from an eastern State College of Home Economics, on "Children's Closets":

"Encouragement of the children to care for their own clothing pays the busy housewife. Besides saving her hundreds of extra steps, it helps to foster independence, responsibility, and neat appearance.

"When a child begins to walk, he may be taught to hang up his night clothes when he gets up in the morning, and his day clothes when he takes them off at night. It is necessary to have books where the child can reach them. If his closet and equipment are built to scale, he soon learns to assume the responsibility of the care of his own clothes. Each child should have a simple laundry bag for his own soiled clothing, and a separate drawer for his clean clothes. Both of these must be low enough for him to reach. For older children a special low rod in the closet holds clothes hangers for dresses and suits.

"In many homes a closet in or near the front hall, built under the angle of the stairs, may be a waste space because it is low and inconvenient for adult members of the family; but as a closet for the children, with low hooks, rod and hangers for their outdoor wraps, low shelves for hats and small playthings, and floorspace for skates and overshoes, it is a boon to children."

Tomorrow we'll have another menu, and a recipe.

Wednesday: "A Dinner for School Boys."

